

• • • • •

Muller, Hana

Mwano, Geoffrey

2010 Otaniemi

Laurea University of Applied Sciences  
Otaniemi, Espoo

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY  
REPRESENTATIVES OF UNACCOMPANIED MINOR  
ASYLUM SEEKERS IN FINLAND

Hana Muller  
Geoffrey Mwano  
Social Services  
Bachelor's Thesis  
November, 2010

Muller Hana, Mwano Geoffrey

**Challenges experienced by representatives of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Finland**

Year	2010	Pages	53
------	------	-------	----

---

The purpose of this study was to find out the challenges experienced by the representatives of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAS). It answers the question: what challenges do representatives encounter in their work? The study is under the Empowering Work Research and Development Path of Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Otaniemi). It was done with the approval of Espoo Group and Family Group Homes (Espoon ryhmä- ja perheryhmäkoti). This unit belongs to the city of Espoo and consists of three group homes for UMAS. The target group consisted of six (6) representatives obtained through a snowballing sampling technique. Semi-structured interviews were used for collecting the data and thematic analysis to identify themes from the data. The analysis indicated challenges within six thematic areas namely relationship building, communication, processing of psychological stress, recruitment process, support for representatives and negative attitudes. These challenges occurred in relation to four groups within the scope of the work of representatives, which included UMAS, authorities, representatives themselves and members of the general public. The age and experiences of the UMAS as well as changing of representatives during the asylum process were mentioned as challenging to the relationship building with the UMAS. On the other hand, constant changes of rules and changes of personnel made building and maintaining relationship with the authorities difficult. The negative attitudes were another perspective of the challenges that both the authorities and the general public had towards the work of the representatives. The findings imply that there is a need for representatives to regroup as a collective unit if they are to find support and solutions to the challenges they face.

Key words: unaccompanied minor asylum seeker, representative, advocacy

## CONTENT

1	INTRODUCTION .....	5
2	REPRESENTATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINOR ASYLUM SEEKERS (UMAS) IN FINLAND.....	6
2.1	Unaccompanied minor asylum seeker.....	6
2.2	The representatives of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers .....	7
2.3	The concept of advocacy.....	8
2.4	The role of representatives.....	8
2.5	The asylum process .....	9
2.5.1	The identification stage .....	9
2.5.2	The appointment of the representative .....	10
2.5.3	The participation to the social worker's initial interview of the UMAS.....	10
2.5.4	The investigation of asylum.....	11
2.5.5	Notification of decision.....	12
2.6	Previous studies .....	13
3	ADVOCACY.....	14
3.1	Defining advocacy .....	14
3.2	Different approaches of advocacy .....	14
3.3	Effective advocacy .....	16
3.4	Advocacy for children and young people .....	17
4	METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION.....	19
4.1	The purpose of the study and the research question .....	19
4.2	Research method .....	19
4.2.1	Participants .....	19
4.2.2	Interviews as a data-gathering method.....	20
4.2.3	Data analysis .....	22
5	FINDINGS.....	26
5.1	Relationship building .....	26
5.1.1	Relationship building with UMAS .....	26
5.1.2	Relationship building with authorities .....	28
5.2	Communication .....	30
5.3	Recruitment of representatives.....	31
5.4	Support for the representatives.....	32
5.5	Processing of psychological stress .....	33
5.6	Negative attitudes.....	34
5.6.1	Negative attitudes of authorities towards representatives and UMAS .....	34
5.6.2	Negative attitudes of the general public members towards representatives.....	35
6	DISCUSSION.....	36
7	TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	42

7.1	Trustworthiness.....	42
7.2	Ethical considerations .....	44
REFERENCES .....		47

Appendices

Abbreviations

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Every year Finland receives people seeking international protection. Among the people received are the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAS). When arriving to Finland, an UMAS is assigned a representative. The representative has the duty of assisting and promoting the interests of the UMAS in the asylum process and during the whole period of the minor's stay in Finland, until he or she reaches the age of 18 years (the Act on Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers Act: 493/1999).

However, in recent years Finland has witnessed a rapid increase of UMAS. This has raised concern among Finnish citizens as well as actors who work with immigrants and refugees (Niemi, 2009). According to the statistics from the Finnish Immigration Services there were 106 applicants in the year 2006. It was followed by a drastic increase in the year 2008 with 708 applicants. In 2009 there was a small decrease, but still 557 UMAS came to Finland.

The rapid increase of UMAS in Finland has naturally caused some challenges to the support functions of the UMAS. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the challenges that the representatives of UMAS face in their work. The study seeks to answer the following research question: what challenges do representatives encounter in their work? In getting the answers to this research question, the study will provide an understanding to the issues that the representatives face in representing UMAS. This is important because there have been numerous responses from scholars in identifying the issues that minor asylum seekers face in Finland. At the same time, the work of representatives has not been looked into, although they play such an important role to the UMAS. As a result, very little is known about the issues facing this working field.

Our interest in looking at the work of representatives is grounded in the view that the way to help the UMAS should go hand in hand with supporting the ones who work with them. Having worked with UMAS it was in our interest to know how the increase of UMAS has impacted the work of the representatives. For further clarification of the idea, Espoo group and family group homes was approached earlier in the year 2009. This is a unit of three group homes owned by the city of Espoo and offers services for UMAS. The unit also works closely with the representatives of UMAS and therefore, it was possible to establish few contacts of representatives as there was no central organisation coordinating the work of representatives. The agreement was reached to undertake this study under Espoo group and family group home, as it was also in the interest of the unit to attain a further understanding of the issues the representatives of UMAS experience in their work.

In this study, the theoretical part clarifies the role of the representatives of UMAS and examines advocacy as the main theoretical framework for the work of the representatives. Some approaches to advocacy and the main principles of effective advocacy are introduced. Furthermore, advocacy is looked into in detail from the perspective of advocacy for children. After the theoretical part, the introduction of the research question, data and the research methods will lead into the findings and analysis of the data collected among the representatives. Finally, the last chapter discusses ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study.

## 2 REPRESENTATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINOR ASYLUM SEEKERS (UMAS) IN FINLAND

In Finland, the basis of appointing a representative and the caring of an unaccompanied minor asylum seeker (UMAS) are reflected both in the Aliens Act (301/2004) and the Finnish Act on Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999). For instance, the section 26 of the Act on Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers states that

a representative may be appointed for a refugee child, a child granted temporary protection status, a child applying for a residence permit or asylum, or a child who is a victim of trafficking, if the child is in Finland without a guardian or other legal representative. An unaccompanied minor who is a victim of trafficking shall always be appointed a representative immediately (Act on Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers 493/1999 section 26).

This chapter establishes the meaning of the major concepts of this study namely unaccompanied minor asylum seeker (UMAS), representative and advocacy. It also highlights the notable characteristics of representation of UMAS in Finland. This includes a brief description of the duties of representatives in an asylum process. This is necessary as it points out the importance of representatives to UMAS. Finally, the section explores the studies that have identified some challenges in the work of representatives in the past.

### 2.1 Unaccompanied minor asylum seeker

The concept unaccompanied minor asylum seeker does not have a straight definition as a concept of its own in the Finnish law. However, definitions exist when it concerns unaccompanied minors or asylum seekers as independent concepts. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR, 1994:121) unaccompanied minors are children less than 18 years old either separated from both parents or are not in custody of an adult who by law is responsible of providing care for them. The law in Finland recognises a person as a

child if he or she is less than 18 years of age (Rantanen, 1998:5). An asylum seeker on the other hand is defined as a person who has fled from his or her home country to another in search for protection and is still waiting for a decision to be recognised as a refugee (UNHCR). Therefore, an unaccompanied minor asylum seeker (UMAS) as a concept can be understood as a child arriving alone in a country other than his or her own, seeking for protection and is still in the process of securing a decision for a refugee status.

UNHCR (1994:1) claims that a child is a child regardless of the background of the child. The fact is that all children need special attention and unaccompanied minors are no exception. As such, UMAS need special attention because most of them are deprived of care and protection that they would have if they were not separated from their families. UNHCR (1994:102) maintains that UMAS may lack some skills to speak for themselves and hence be on a receiving end of injustice. Moreover, the unfamiliar environments of the host country and the intensity of the process involved can be intimidating for UMAS to voice their needs even if they have skills to do so on their own. That is why there is a need for UMAS to be assigned a representative whose main duty is to assure, assist and promote the rights and the best interest of the UMAS in the asylum process (UNHCR, 1994:102).

According to the statistics from Finnish Immigration Office ([www.migri.fi](http://www.migri.fi)) a big amount of UMAS come from Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. The reasons for UMAS seeking asylum in Finland are mainly associated with wars in the countries where the UMAS come from, domestic violence, running from threats and fear of being persecuted. Once at the Finnish border, an UMAS is not denied entry and is appointed a representative before the start of the asylum process (Mikkonen and Niitamo 2000:11). While waiting for asylum interviews the UMAS are placed in a group home that has a reception centre for hosting them. The statistics from the Finnish Immigration Office show that there are altogether 24 units established for hosting minors ([www.migri.fi](http://www.migri.fi)). These units are located throughout Finland.

## 2.2 The representatives of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers

International Organisation for Migration (IOM 2002:260) asserts that any ordinary citizen can be appointed to be a representative of UMAS in Finland. However, the person has to be willing, familiar with Finnish legislations and able to take the minor's interests into account (Act on Integration of Immigrants and reception of Asylum Seekers, 493/1993, Section 27). The representative is legally authorised to take the guardian role for the child and can be consulted by authorities on matters pertaining to the UMAS (Act 493/1999, Section 26). According to Espoo group and family group home, in October 2009 there were 13 representatives repre-



senting the UMAS living in its premises. At the moment the number of representatives has increased to 18.

It is worth to note that the concept of representation has got other synonyms. In some texts the concept guardianship is used. Others prefer the use of legal representation denoting the legal authority entrusted to a person to act on behalf of someone else (see IOM, 2002:260). While this study agrees to both pair of synonyms, the concept of representative is preferred because it appears in the official Finnish legislation. Also, to remove any doubt a consultation was made to the Finnish Ministry of Interior concerning the usage of these terminologies in Finland. It was confirmed that the representative is an official English concept used in Finland.

### 2.3 The concept of advocacy

Advocacy as a major concept for this study forms the main theoretical framework underpinning the work of representatives. International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC, 2004:66) asserts that advocacy for UMAS consists of efforts both public and private needed for protection of the rights and interest of unaccompanied minors and separated children. Newbigging et al (2010:xii) contend that advocacy for unaccompanied minors and refugee children aims at increasing possibilities, access to suitable support and empowering individuals. This concept will be explored in detail in the later chapter concerning advocacy.

### 2.4 The role of representatives

The Finnish Act on Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999) provides that the main responsibility of the representative is to protect the rights and interests of an UMAS in the asylum process (Section 26). The representative has to ensure all decisions taken on behalf of the child concur with the minor's best interests. In this case, the representative has to determine the minor's best interest beforehand. In doing so, the representative is supposed to take into consideration the minor's ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds (Act 493/1999 sect 26, 3, see also International Organisation for Migration 2002:265).

Although a day-to-day care of the UMAS is a responsibility of a group home, the representative has a duty of ensuring that the unaccompanied minor has a suitable care and accommodation, receives proper education, health provisions and receives language support. In gen-

eral, the representative has a big say on the minor's living arrangement (Act on Integration 493/1999, section 26, 2).

The representatives are also obliged to assist the UMAS in matters concerning family reunification in case the UMAS has a family that he or she wants to be rejoined with. He or she has an important role of assisting the minor to make informed choices through provision of clear information. If possible, he or she is responsible of creating the link between the minor and different organizations, which provide services to the minor. This can be done in cooperation with the social worker (IOM, 2002:265).

The Aliens Act (301/2004 section 6) emphasises that the representation of UMAS and the process of asylum has to be guided by the principle of the "best interests of the child". The Aliens Act 301/2004 section 6 states, "Special attention shall be paid to the best interest of the child and to circumstances related to the child's development and health". The Act maintains that before making any decisions that concern the child, efforts have to be made to listen to the view of the child unless the child is not capable of doing so. The views of the child should be taken into consideration in accordance with the age and development of the child. It is also emphasized that a younger child may also be heard provided the child is mature enough to articulate his or her own views.

## 2.5 The asylum process

The asylum process requires the involvement of the representative because it is a very crucial period when the authorities (mainly police and immigration officers) investigate the grounds for granting a refuge to an UMAS. It involves several stages that last a long time. Nowadays, according to the "Guide for representatives of minor asylum seekers" (2010:8) the process can last up to 192 days compared to 115 in the year 2008. This period can be very stressful for the minors and therefore, the representatives have an important role in maintaining safe and assuring conditions for the minors. Other duties for the representatives can also be seen in some of the stages of the asylum process as described below.

### 2.5.1 The identification stage

Usually the first stage of asylum process starts with identification and filing for asylum. This is done by the UMAS him or herself at the police or border, immediately after arrival. The police or border control officer (depending who encountered the minor first) records the basic information of the UMAS. The UMAS has the opportunity to fill the form in his or her own language in case the UMAS knows how to read and write. If the UMAS does not know how to read

and write, the officer has to help in filling the form and in the end the translator tells what is written on the form. This is done in accordance with the principle of best interests of the child. Afterwards, the police or border officer contacts reception centre about the possibility of accommodating a new unaccompanied minor. If the reception centre has room, the UMAS is taken to that reception centre to wait for the asylum investigation to start. (The Guide for representatives of minor asylum seekers, 2010:9, Kursula J, 2009).

### 2.5.2 The appointment of the representative

As soon as the UMAS has been accommodated to a reception centre, the representative is assigned to the UMAS. The process of appointing the representative is initiated by the social worker of the reception centre where the UMAS is accommodated. The social worker contacts the person to be a representative and asks if he or she is interested in representing the UMAS. If the person is willing to do so, the social worker sends the name of the representative to the District Court for approval (IOM 2002:261).

Once the approval is done, the representative is informed and he or she officially becomes a representative of a new UMAS. The information of the appointment of the representative is also sent to the Immigration authorities and to the Employment and Economic Development Centres (T&E Centres: Työ- ja elinkeinokeskus). According to IOM (2002:261), the Employment and Economic Development Centres and the Ministry of labour are responsible for paying remuneration cost incurred by the representatives.

### 2.5.3 The participation to the social worker's initial interview of the UMAS

Usually a social worker conducts an initial interview with the UMAS a few days after the unaccompanied minor has been accommodated to the reception centre. The purpose of this interview is to estimate the general needs of the child for the support of the social worker. The representative is usually invited to participate in this interview. This provides an opportunity for the representative to get important information of the situation of the child. The representative can then pass forward the necessary information to the lawyers of the child or other parties. This can ease the burden for the UMAS having to repeat similar information to different authorities.

Moreover, participating to the interview provides a chance for the representative to tell the UMAS about his or her role as a representative, the process of seeking asylum and tracking the parents of the child through the Finnish Red Cross, ensuring that the minor understands his or her own rights and knows what the representative stands for. This helps in building a

trustful relation before the investigation for asylum starts with the authorities. If agreed, both the UMAS and the representative sign consent to representation (The Guide for representatives of minor asylum seekers, 2010:11).

#### 2.5.4 The investigation of asylum

After the social worker's initial interview the UMAS undergoes through a series of interviews conducted by the Finnish authorities. First, the police or the border officer will conduct the interview to find out about the identity of the UMAS, family background, situation at home as well as the route from the home country to Finland. Then the Finnish Immigration office carries out the hearings in order to establish the grounds behind the child's application for asylum. The interviews are only done in Oulu, Imatra, Lappeenranta and Helsinki.

The representative always has duties before and during the interviews. These include assuring the UMAS by telling what the interviews entail. According to the Guide for Representatives of Minor Asylum Seekers, (2010:13) the child will feel more secure about the interviews if the representative explains in advance the prerequisite of the interview. It is emphasized that the representative should tell the child to be honest and that giving false information may affect the asylum application.

Moreover, the representative will be the one to take contact with the authorities and agree on the hearing schedule. The representative is supposed to ensure that the child has eaten and is in good condition for the interview. This is done in cooperation with the reception centre where the minor is accommodated (Guide for Representatives of Minor Asylum Seekers 2010:18). He or she is required to inform the interviewer in advance if the child's health might affect the interview process.

During the interviews, the representative ensures that the child is comfortable and understands the questions asked. He or she makes sure that the recorded information is correct and that the answers of the minor are recorded in the way they were stated. In the end the child signs the transcript and in case the child is under the age of 15, the representative also signs the transcripts (Guide for Representatives of Minor Asylum Seekers, 2010:16).

The Finnish authorities may require age assessment of the child if the child's age is of doubt. According to International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2002:51- 52) the methods used can range from x-raying bone age, dental age and social age. If the person is proved to be an adult, he/she is transferred to an adult reception centre. In this case, the legal representative ceases to represent the person. However, if the child wants to complain about the result

of age assessment, he or she can do so with the help of the representative to look for necessary measures or consulting the legal counsel.

#### 2.5.5 Notification of decision

After the interview by Finnish Immigration services, the UMAS and the representative ought to wait for notification of the decision. This is submitted to the police authority of the child's domicile municipality. The police authority will inform the UMAS and the representative about this decision. In these cases an interpreter must always be provided for a child in order not to make any misinterpretations. In case the decision is negative, the UMAS has the right to appeal to Helsinki Administrative Court within 30 days after receiving the decision with assistance from the representative and a lawyer. Until the new decision by the court is made, the child has the right to remain in the country.

In case of deportation, the representative should check with the lawyer whether it is necessary to apply for suspension of the decision from the Administrative Court (Hallinto oikeus-Finnish terminology). If there is no justification for suspension, the representative has the duty of making sure that the child understands the situation and the reasons for the decision. According to the Guide for representatives of minor asylum seekers (2010:22), a child can also be sent to a country, which has adopted the Dublin Regulation. In this manner, an application for the delay must be submitted to the Helsinki Administrative Court early enough with combination of the request.

When an UMAS is granted a residence permit to stay in Finland, the representative has the responsibility to guide the UMAS to attain Finnish identity number and other important registrations such as obtaining a valid passport, family reunification or any legal support. The representative is also responsible for making sure that the integration plan for the child commences as soon as possible. According to Guardianship Services Act, section 92, a representative is obligated to confidentiality during the whole asylum process (Guide for representatives of minor asylum seekers, 2010:27).

The representative ceases to represent the UMAS if the UMAS reaches the age of 18 years, if the UMAS is deported back to the home country or due to other personal reason such as becoming sick to the extent that the sickness affects the representation of the UMAS or by the request from the UMAS to change the representative.

## 2.6 Previous studies

As it has been mentioned earlier in the introduction, the purpose of this study was to find out the challenges that the representatives of UMAS face in their work. Efforts have been made to review some studies that pointed to the challenges in the work of representatives in Finland. The review shows that there is lack of sufficient amount of studies conducted on the work of representatives. Suffice to say the studies reviewed highlighted significant issues that the representatives experience in their work.

The study done by Välisalo (2005:54-57) pointed out some challenges that the representatives of UMAS face in Finland. One of the challenges mentioned in his study was lack of clarity on the role of the representative (Välisalo 2005:54). This brought about misunderstandings among the representatives themselves as well as group homes and social workers. Since the group home is responsible for day-to-day caring of UMAS, the staff at the group homes were confused as to who is responsible for taking care of the minors.

Moreover, Välisalo (2005:56) claimed that representatives were also worried about the training for the new representatives. Since there is a shortage of representatives to meet the rising numbers of UMAS, people were recruited in such a short notice that they did not have specific training on working with children, let alone children from different backgrounds. In his study, Välisalo used qualitative methods to examine the national policies related to family reunification and aftercare of the unaccompanied children in Finland and Greece. He used varied samples of participants to obtain his data.

According to Rantanen (1998:24-25) one of the challenges the representatives in Finland face is the lack of terms of references for the representatives. The terms of reference would help in clarifying practical matters such as who is responsible for representatives' training, their responsibility and so on, so as to avoid possible conflict of authority. This in a way is similar to what Välisalo had already suggested. Without clear definition of roles and responsibilities, representatives face possible misunderstandings with other personnel dealing with UMAS.

A significant issue indicated in the report by Rantanen was the lack of internal network that would support the work of legal representatives (1998: 26). According to Rantanen, that was seen as important for helping representatives to come up with collective solutions on the many challenges they experience. However, that was not working and representatives worked individually. Rantanen compiled the final report of Children at Risk where these issues were brought up in the training sessions for representatives.

### 3 ADVOCACY

This section is structured in order to introduce the theoretical framework relating to the work of representatives. When considering the role of representatives, advocacy was seen to form an underlying theoretical foundation to the work of representatives of the UMAS. Boylan and Dalrymple (2009:2) imply that advocacy can be a skill or a role and that “most practitioners working with children and young people have, within their remit, an advocacy role. They use advocacy skills to promote the rights and interests of the service users”. Therefore, this section explores issues related to advocacy in relation to the work of representatives. Advocacy for children and young people is looked into in order to establish issues within that field since the work of representatives involves working with children up to the age of 17.

#### 3.1 Defining advocacy

Since advocacy is defined in many ways, the aim here is not to identify the precise definition of advocacy. Nevertheless, it is crucial to provide some descriptions of advocacy in order to get an insight of how the principles of advocacy coincide with the practice of representation. Payne (2009:123) asserts that advocacy simply mean “to speak on behalf of others in favour of their interests”. Brandon (1995 as cited in Bateman 2000:17) considers advocacy as “a device to influence the balance of the needs or rights of the group in the favour of the needs or rights of the individuals, especially those on the social margins.”

Dunning (1995:11) takes it even further by claiming that “advocacy is about stating a case, influencing decisions, ending assumptions, getting better services, being treated equally, being included, protecting from the abuse, redressing the balance of power, being more aware of and exercising rights.” Similarly to the notion of Dunning, representatives influence decisions on behalf of unaccompanied minors in the asylum process. They ensure that UMAS receive better services, protect them from abuse as well as enhance UMAS to claim their rights (as described in section 3).

#### 3.2 Different approaches of advocacy

Bateman (2000:18) points out three approaches to advocacy: self-advocacy, legal advocacy and citizen advocacy. For the practitioners who are in favour of self-advocacy he claims that it enhances individuals or a group of people to speak and act on their own behalf in order to achieve own needs and interests (Bateman 2000:18). This notion of advocacy opposes the idea that advocacy only happens when a third party person acts on behalf of another individual. In fact, the approach of self-advocacy is effective if organised collectively for the benefit of the

majority against the individual service provider. An example is for example when the bus drivers organise a demonstration against the employer on a certain condition of their work.

As for individuals, they practice self-advocacy when they are able to clearly say their opinion and make their own choices. A simple example of self-advocacy that an individual practices almost every day is when one speaks up to challenge a certain establishment, which exists either in school, home or in a community that denies his or her right. Therefore, being able to articulate own views is self-advocacy on its own right. However, it becomes more effective if organised collectively.

Perhaps the widest used form of advocacy in Scandinavian countries is citizen advocacy (Bateman, 2000:25). This form of advocacy speaks a lot about representatives as advocates of UMAS in Finland. Building on Sang and O'Brien's (1984:9) definition of citizen advocacy, Bateman (2000:24) upholds that citizen advocacy occurs when a normal citizen creates a helping relationship with another person, who is at risk of being marginalised or treated unfairly and represents that other person's interests as if they were his or her own. Normally this form of advocacy is voluntary. Key to this form of advocacy is that the advocate forms a partnership with the service user to ensure the user's best interest (Bateman 2000: 25). The description of representatives of UMAS in Finland bears a similarity with the description of citizen advocacy. The only exception is that the representatives of UMAS in Finland are partly compensated on the costs incurred while working with UMAS (refer to section 2.5.2 of this study).

According to Bateman (2000:25) citizen advocacy has an advantage of enhancing close relationship between the advocate and the individual represented. It also allows the advocate to use his or her own time to improve the life of the individual they represent. In many cases it enables the individuals represented to feel more secure compared to if they were represented by an official person. This is so because a citizen advocate normally has no affiliation of any kind with the organization providing the services.

Unfortunately, citizen advocacy has some shortcomings. It appears that there is no clear code of conduct guiding citizen advocates on a certain standard of procedure. This leads to rising of different roles and styles of working among citizen advocates (Bateman, 2000:25). The supervisors of citizen advocates normally assign too many responsibilities for the citizen advocates to handle. As a result, some citizen advocates might perceive themselves as a friend, counsellor, or an advisor of the individuals they represent.

Furthermore, Bateman (2000:25-26) contends that citizen advocacy suffers significantly of slow response of services from a service provider to a citizen advocate. This is the biggest



obstacle that faces citizen advocates to help the individual represented to attain something they need on time. In worst cases, some citizen advocates are coerced to cooperate with the service provider in altering the behaviour of the individual they represent (Bateman citing the research findings by Bristol Advocacy project: page 25 - 26).

The final approach of advocacy is "legal advocacy", which mainly retains the traditional involvement of lawyers in representing the clients in the court of law. This particular domain of advocacy demands a practitioner who is familiar with law proceedings (Bateman, 2000:27). Therefore, it excludes all other practitioners who have no legal trainings. Bateman provides that both the self-advocacy and citizen advocacy can benefit with an application of legal principles and it is important to use law in all forms of advocacy (Bateman, 2000:27). Representatives of UMAS utilise this aspect of advocacy well in Finland. There are refugee advisory centres that offer legal advice to both the UMAS and the representative.

### 3.3 Effective advocacy

In order to maintain effective advocacy, an advocate should first aim at helping the marginalised with clarifying their own views and then represent those views according to the wish of the individual. Quality advocacy practice should be built upon a solid partnership between a vulnerable person (partner) and an advocate. This means that the partner's views and wishes guide and lead the process of advocacy. An advocate should aim to capture and represent the views and wishes of the person represented in the way the person articulated them. Wertheimer, (1998) implies that listening and capturing the views and wishes of partners not only guide the process of advocacy, but also empower the vulnerable person to feel valued, listened and represented.

Barnes and Brandon (2002:40) explain this notion better by denoting that an advocate should always strive to work according to the direction of the service users. They say:

Advocates do not work in the best interests of the service users but work to their direction. Advocates listen, help service users explore options and support them to obtain information so that their decision can be informed. (Barnes and Brandon 2002:40)

The above quotation implies that a good advocate will imply different skills in helping the service users to obtain what they need by listening, providing opportunities and above all being totally committed to the service users' wish.

Advocates should be given freedom to act independently on behalf of the people they represent. Brooke (2002:14) ascertains that the effectiveness of the advocate depends on whether one is allowed freedom to practice. Dalrymple and Hough (1995:115) maintain that advocates should be able to challenge oppression without fear.

### 3.4 Advocacy for children and young people

Many aspects have influenced development of advocacy for children and young people. In the context of this study, the most important are the discourses relating to childhood development and human rights. In terms of childhood development, Boylan & Dalrymple (2009:36) explain that children develop from dependent to independent individuals in their adulthood. In their childhood, children are widely perceived biologically and cognitively as immature and thus dependent. However, they are developing towards independent adulthood. Therefore, there is a need to look into the power relations between the adult representative and the child.

A central element to advocacy in this approach is the empowerment of the child. Dalrymple and Hough (2005:106-107) argue that children are oppressed in the society because they are viewed from the adult point of view as objects of concern rather than capable individuals. This would indicate a concern about power relationship between the adult and the child. Therefore, there is a need to include children in decision making to ensure more balanced power relations. If the power relations are not balanced, adults may easily silence the voices of children and young people (Boylan & Dalrymple 2009:35). Therefore, the empowering process starts when an adult is actively listening the needs and feelings of a child.

As for the representatives, if they ought to understand the principles of advocacy and the need for the UMAS to become independent, it is important to examine the development of childhood. As a result of this, the representatives ought to consider the age and stage of development in which children can be involved in decision making about their care. The Finnish Aliens Act (301/2004) makes it clear in section 6 by stating that, "Special attention shall be paid to the best interest of the child and to circumstances related to the child's development and health" and that in making the decision the child should be listened. This Act provides a good guideline to representatives in relation to what Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) are proposing concerning the influence of childhood in advocacy for children.

The necessity of taking the views of the child into account is also supported by the human rights framework concerning children. The most important legally binding document concerning children is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children (UNCRC, 1989).

The convention is universally agreed on and it offers a set of measures on ensuring the maximum protection of the rights of children. The UNCRC requires that a child should be listened to and given opportunity to articulate his or her own views. This is stated in the article 12 of the UNCRC

States Parties shall assure the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely on all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

In addition, one of the core principles of the UNCRC is the “best interest of the child” which is stated in the article 3:

in all actions concerning the child, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.

As Dalrymple and Boylan (2009:8-9) say, the best interest of the child is one of the most challenging approaches for the people who are working with children. This is because most practitioners guided by the principle of the best interest of the child end up with conflicting relation with the service providers by stating up the views of the child, which might be perceived as harmful to the child him or herself. The core question is who defines the best interest of the child: is it the child him or herself, or the adult involved with the child?

Although the UNCRC does not directly address the appointment of a representative of UMAS, it provides the directive measures for assisting and protecting the rights of the UMAS through the principle of the best interest. For example in the article 20 it states,

a child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance by the state. (UNCRC, 1989, article 20, 1).

As part of the child’s best interest, the Finnish Act on integration of immigrants and reception of asylum seekers (section 26, 3) provides that a representative has to take into account the child’s ethnic, linguistics, religious and educational backgrounds in determining the best interest of the child. However, Jandt (2004:42-45) argues that there are no precise guidelines for practitioners (representatives), which guide on how to proceed with the interaction with people from diverse background. Thus, without guidelines on intercultural communication, practitioners may find themselves to be hegemonic helpers rather than being accommodating persons who respect and have tolerance for differences.

## 4 METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

### 4.1 The purpose of the study and the research question

The purpose of this study was to find out the challenges that the representatives of UMAS experience in their work. The study answered a single research question namely: What challenges do representatives encounter in their work? By securing the answers to this research question, the study provides an understanding to the issues that the representatives face in representing UMAS. It also provides an opportunity for the representatives to speak about the issues of concern to them.

### 4.2 Research method

In this study, the qualitative research methods were used. The methods include semi-structured interview guided with topics for gathering the data and thematic analysis based on an induction for analyzing it. As Mason (2002:7) mentions, qualitative research should produce explanations or arguments, rather than claiming to offer more descriptions. In this study, the semi-structured interview as a method of qualitative research gives an opportunity to express the interviewees' experiences well. It allows the informants to express their arguments about how things work in the representative's particular field or how things should work. It appears that any study can face criticism because of chosen methods since both qualitative and quantitative methods have their own challenges and shortcomings. For this study, qualitative methods were found more advantaged to be used. As Kvale mentions (1996: 30), the purpose of qualitative research interview is to achieve descriptions of the lived word of the participants with an understanding of the meaning of the described phenomena. As for this study, interviews allow the interviewees to express their thoughts better than by filling in questionnaires.

#### 4.2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were selected with specific criteria. For practical reasons, one criterion for the selection was the area where the participants work in order to avoid long distance travel. The participants should have an experience of the work for at least one year. In addition, another criterion was the language. It was preferable that participants should be able to handle the interviews in English. Finally, the fourth criterion was that there should be both men and women participating in the study. The age of the participants did not play a role for the study.

The participants were selected by a method called snowballing. According to Denscombe (2003: 16), snowballing is a process where the research involves only a few participants at the beginning. The involved participants will suggest other possible participants for the study. As Denscombe (2003:16) states "Snowballing is an effective technique for building up a reasonable-sized sample."

For this study, the director of Espoo group and family group homes was contacted in order to find the first contacts of the participants since there was no central organization of representatives. The director gave some contact information of representatives and it was ensured that there was a contact of at least two representatives who were able to give other contacts. This method of snowballing for reaching out participants was found fruitful. However, other ways to increase the number of interested participants were also considered.

For this reason, the conductors of this study attended a training seminar of representatives on 12.-13<sup>th</sup> of May 2009 in Helsinki. The idea was to present this study in order to find more participants. The seminar was an opportunity to build up the networking with the representatives, especially because it was organized for all representatives from Finland. Those representatives who expressed their interest were contacted later with invitation letters with Informed consent and letter of the purposes of the thesis. The list of representatives was gathered during the seminar. Through this method, we got 2 participants.

The final group of participants consisted of 6 representatives, both women and men. They came from southern Finland, except for one participant. All the participants were Finns and all of them accomplished the criterion of speaking English in the interview. Nevertheless, during the interviews some of the words, especially terminology were told in Finnish (e.g. "edustaja"). All 6 participants received the letter of Informed consent before the actual interviews and it was signed by both sides when the interview started (between interviewee and interviewers).

#### 4.2.2 Interviews as a data-gathering method

As mentioned earlier, the data was gathered through semi-structured interviews guided with themes. Denscombe (2003:167) asserts that

With semi-structured interview the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which topics are considered, and perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the is-

sues rose by the researcher. The answers are open-ended, and there is more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest.

Also according to Mason (2004: 62) thematic interviewing has many topics, which should be answered but interviewers design to have a fluid and flexible structure. This allows new topics with reliable data to come out from the interviewees during the dialogue. In this study, the topics of the interview were left open enough to allow participants to speak freely and provide different perspectives. The topics functioned as a structure for interviewers to follow when interviewing. May (2001:123) asserts that that the semi-structured interview with a topical guide allows the interviewers to have a certain structure of what to probe while allowing the informants to answer on their own terms.

All interviews were carried out by both conductors of this study at the same time. It was one interviewee and two interviewers at one interview session. According to Descombe (2003: 167) face to face interviews are the most common form of semi-structured interviews. It is relatively easy to arrange and easier to control. In order to guarantee the result of data, one of the conductors was interviewing and the other one was listening and trying pick up missing information and inconsistencies arising from the discussion. Nevertheless, the roles were alternated between the interviews.

The topics with sub - questions for the interview were planned beforehand. It was agreed that the first interview would be used as a test after which topics might be improved. Nevertheless, topics for the questionnaires did not change at all after the first interview, but some questions were added. Among the topics for the questionnaires were; Experiences about the work, handling diversities, networking among representatives and cooperation with the authorities.

As mentioned earlier one of the criteria of selecting the participants was ability to communicate in English. Language is the key to the interviews, "It is the medium through which data is collected. It is essential that questions be asked in a language that the interviewee can make sense of, and which is understood in the same sense that interviewer intends." (David and Sutton, 2004:89). The interviews were audiotaped and later on transcribed. According to Denscombe (2003:176) audio tape-recording offers a permanent sound storage. On the other hand, it captures only speech, and misses non-verbal communication and other contextual factors. Although the non-verbal communication is an important part during an interview, in this study it was not considered as one of the research methods.

The places where the interviews took place were suggested by the participants. The time of the interview was not longer than 1 hour. The language of the interviews was English with some Finnish terminology, which was later on translated into English.

#### 4.2.3 Data analysis

The aim of the data analysis is to provide the objectivity of data without losing their original content and also to provide structure, clear and systematic text of the data gathered from participants through the interviews. In this study thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis involves identifying the themes arising from the data. Several authors (such as Punch, 1998:200; Miles, 1979:591 & Silverman 1993:211) refer to thematic analysis as an induction process of getting the concepts and theories from the data itself. As Bryman (2008:598) mentions

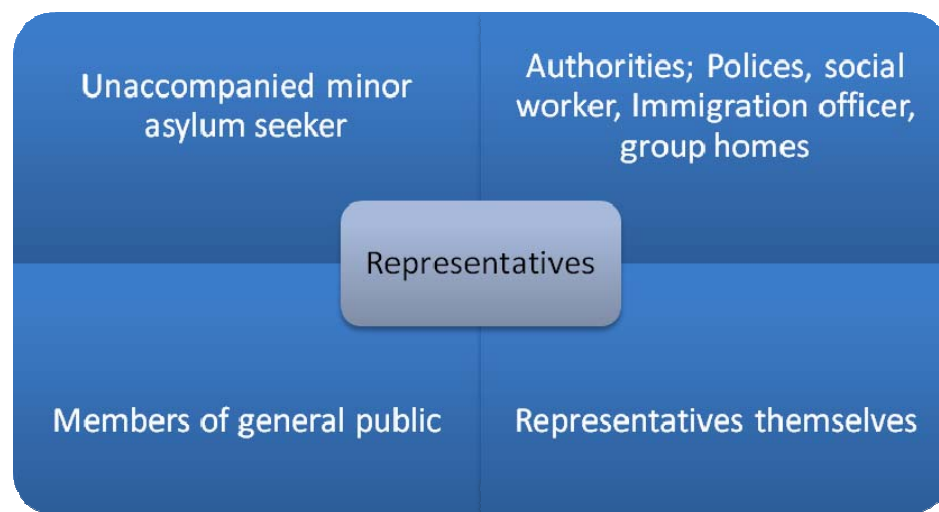
thematic analysis involves grouping together of instances, phrases and words of interview transcript under an umbrella terminology that denotes a theme. This is mainly done through coding the data. There is no specific criterion used to identify the themes. However, one way is to look at the reoccurrence of the certain instances cited in the transcripts through the use of coding method.

Coding is one of the methods used to organize and label the data into meaningful units. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000:782) say, codes act as tags to label text in a mass of raw data for later retrieval. This involves marking phrases or quotations, which suggest a certain meaning. As Jorgensen (1989:107) suggests, "the researcher of the study will sort and shift them, searching for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns or wholes. The aim of the process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion". In other words, coding helps to reduce the data so that it becomes clear for the researchers to interpret (Punch, 1998:203).

The analysis process began by transcribing the 6 interviews. The first 3 interviews were transcribed word by word. However, the last 3 interviews' expression other than words were omitted because it proved to be time consuming to include everything and it made transcription to look fragmented and difficult to understand. These included hesitations, gap fillers, and laughter. After the transcription of the interviews, the transcripts were read once again by both conductors of the study in order to familiarize themselves with the data. This gave grounds for discussion on how to proceed on reconstructing the data into meaningful units. For that purpose, phrases were marked by different colors as tags that denote certain theme or meaning coherent to the research question.

When looking at the themes marked by different colorful codes, patterns of relations to the work of representatives were openly seen. The data showed that four groups formed direct or indirect relation to the work of representatives. The groups that formed direct relationship with the representative were the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAS), authorities and representatives in relation to themselves. The members of general public were seen as forming indirect relation to the work of representatives.

TABLE 1: Categories in relation to the representative within the scope of his or her work



The coding book was opened and the four groups were moved into as categories that contain the themes identified. Coding book according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000:781) is a list of organized codes that form a hierarchical order. There is no specific method of making the themes. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:780) assert that themes are unclear concepts identified by a researcher by looking at the process, action assumption and consequences of the data. The analysis of this study looked at the final suggestion and assumption that the quotations made. Specific words in the quotations that suggested a certain pattern of meaning were picked as a clue to a theme. Some quotations contained words that depicted clear meaning and thus made the identification of themes easy. Other quotations contained phrases that needed a look at the whole contextual meaning. In this case comparisons to identify similarities and differences were done. The creation of themes yielded six themes and four categories. The table 2 below shows how one of the themes was identified.



TABLE 2: An example of identifying a theme of relationship building with authorities

Original Quotes	Patterns of conversation	Category	Criterion used	A theme
<i>"Of course you have to be in contact with the police, the immigration authorities and the people who work in different layers and all kind of different people. So I think one of the key things in that is to be brave, active and sometimes innovative"</i>	<i>...Contact with the police, the Immigration authorities and the people who work in different...</i>	Authorities	Contextual meaning	Relationship building
<i>"And you know within certain times you can find out and build up the relationship for those people as well. And it is better for the child as well".</i>	<i>...and build up the relationship for those people as well...</i>	Authorities	Specific word	Relationship building

The illustrated quotations referred to in this study were marked using the initial of the word informant (I) with numbers 1-6 such as I1 - I6. This does not mean the informants were named according to the order they were interviewed.

All in all, the themes of challenges, which arose within the four categories, included relationship building, communication, recruitment of representatives, support for representatives, processing of psychological stress as well as negative attitudes.

TABLE 3: The analytical diagram showing the thematic areas of challenges faced by representatives within different categories.

Themes	Relationship Building	Communication	Recruitment Process	Support	Processing of psychological stress	Negative attitudes
Categories						
UMAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The age and the maturity of the child</li> <li>➤ Experiences of the child</li> <li>➤ Changing representatives during the asylum process</li> <li>➤ Waiting time during asylum process causes stressful situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Interpreter has not enough skills of particular language</li> <li>➤ Ethnic background causes tension between a child and interpreter</li> <li>➤ Interference of privacy</li> </ul>				
Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Adjusting on different set of the rules</li> <li>➤ Changes of political system</li> <li>➤ Uncertainty of losing independent form of representation</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Qualification of representatives</li> <li>➤ Personal conflicts between rep. &amp; recruiter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Trainings offered by authorities</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Treating UMAS from the adult point of view i.e. cynical behavior</li> <li>➤ Authorities undervaluing the role of representatives</li> </ul>
Representatives themselves					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ finding answers to questions by UMAS</li> <li>➤ Influencing decisions</li> </ul>	
General Public						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Negative opinions and racist comment on the role of representatives &amp; towards people working with UMAS</li> </ul>

## 5 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analytical results of the data collected through the interviews of the representatives of UMAS. According to the analysis, six themes were identified denoting a number of challenges facing representatives. Such themes arose within the four categories, and included relationship building, communication, recruitment of representatives, support for representatives, processing of psychological stress as well as attitudes. Some of the themes overlap and appear within two categories. The categories, which came out in the analysis of the data represent four groups that formed a direct or indirect relationship with the scope of the work of representatives. Such categories included the UMAS, the authorities, the general public and the representative him or herself. The category of authorities includes personnel such as police officers, immigration officers, ministry personnel, group home staff and social workers. The findings are presented within these six themes that denote different challenges within the categories.

### 5.1 Relationship building

Relationship building is always a complex process influenced by various issues. However, relationship building was not that easy and needed extra effort. The theme of relationship building stretched itself from the categories of UMAS to authorities. It contained a number of challenges that the representatives faced while working both with the UMAS and the authorities. With UMAS, it was crucial to build a trusted relationship because it helped the representatives to explore possible ways of helping the UMAS. Likewise, representatives considered that a good relationship with the authorities was also important to their work, as it benefitted the UMAS as well.

#### 5.1.1 Relationship building with UMAS

The age of the UMAS was brought up as having a significant impact on relationship building. In case of the interaction, the age, especially with children less than twelve years old, was seen to create a challenge. The informants reported that the challenge came up when they had to discuss sensitive issues especially with small children. In this respect, the representatives had to know the UMAS well enough to estimate the kind of information the child can comprehend and deal with. One informant gave an example on how he had to advice a grandmother of an UMAS not to talk too much about the problems they were facing in the home country. This was because the UMAS was too young to process such news.

“Well, you can’t tell everything to a seven year old girl, about what problems you have...then I tried to explain to this grandmother by phone through interpreter; that don’t tell everything to this little girl. She has enough problems already, she’s alone here and she misses you enormously, don’t tell her all about your problems, she can’t handle it”. (I4)

Age was not the only barrier towards enhancing smooth interaction. The informant stated that the maturity and the experiences of a child also have an impact on how a representative should interact when informing sensitive issues to the child.

“Another thing, if you have a 15 or 16 years old boy that have experienced quite a lot himself, then you can tell we have now this problem, you can discuss with the child and present all alternatives what you would do. But for a child that is less than twelve, about that age it depends also about the person. Sometimes you can’t even tell the girl anything yet even if she is already 16. That she is so immature that she can’t handle the problems” (I4)

As also shown by the example above, previous experiences of the UMAS can be a bonus to interaction and hence to a good relationship. However, as another informant remarked, sometimes the previous experiences can cause challenges for the relationship building between the representatives and the UMAS. This was especially the case with UMAS who have a difficult background, such as UMAS who have experienced sexual or physical abuse or some other traumatic events.

“Especially if there is a child who has a background of an abuse and difficulties, like, trauma and if you don’t have a family or maybe, your family has been killed or all kinds of different backgrounds they have. So especially with those children the relationship is even more difficult to build... (I1)

Considering the quote above, the informant implied that children with difficult experiences might have difficulties in trusting or being comfortable with representatives. For example, a sexually abused girl might not feel comfortable to tell all of her experiences to a male representative. However, the informant said that happens rarely and they make exceptions to accommodate such experiences.

On the other hand, also the experiences the UMAS go through during the asylum seeking process may cause difficulties for the representatives to build and maintain a trustful relationship with the UMAS. For example, the waiting time was mentioned as a stressful situation and hard to understand for the UMAS. This was observed in a way the UMAS demanded an expla-

nation from the representative on why they were not getting the decisions on time. As one informant said, "It is very hard sometimes mentally for children." (I2) As for the representatives, the difficulties arose in finding answers to the difficult questions asked by UMAS and thus, having some effects on supporting the building of a trustful relationship.

Changing of representatives was also among the issues that seemed to affect relationship building between the representative and the UMAS. According to the informants, such cases put UMAS on a situation where he or she has to adjust and relay information from one representative to another. These kinds of changes have proven to cause unnecessary problems for the UMAS and have an impact on relationship building. One informant was of the opinion that it would be better for a representative to keep the UMAS he or she has been appointed for until the asylum decision has been reached. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, but the representatives sometimes change during the process. If it becomes necessary to change the representative, enough information concerning the minor should be given to the new representative.

"So they had the representative from capital area when they moved to (name of the reception centre). In the beginning they were very confused. First, they told their story to the first one. Then they moved up to (.....) and then they should change after this one. At least (UMAS) from (.....) said that if you want to know something about me you can read in the paper. I don't like to repeat or tell you anything because I don't know you. Because they have been so hard in the beginning, the first two months, the first representative kept the boy about six, seven months at least. So then you have to come as new representative for the child and you don't know anything you just have to read the papers and try to find out what kind of background has this person. So it would be so much easier already when you come to the country, they say that this one should be sent to (part of the Finland) and you get that child at once" (I4)

#### 5.1.2 Relationship building with authorities

Since representatives have to work a lot with authorities, the informants felt that it was important to build and maintain good relationship with authorities working with UMAS. The informants were of the view that they must do a lot on their own in order to maintain good relationship with authorities or otherwise the UMAS they represent will be affected negatively. On the other hand, extra effort is sometimes needed for building relationship with various people in order to be able to find solutions for the UMAS.

“So I think one of the key things in that is to be brave, active, and sometimes innovative. Because you have to find different kinds of rounds, sometimes you have to call many people and just do even without knowing what you do, but you just have to find out. If you are another person who has limits or not brave enough to call somebody whom you do not know it is very difficult to do this work” (I1)

Maintaining good relationship with a wide network of authorities was also considered helpful. It provided opportunities for the representatives to be up-to-date, as there were constant changes in the field. The informants felt that there are different policies, sets of rules and constant changes of staff in each and every institution. To understand and keep up with all the changes presented challenges to the informants with the need of having to adjust themselves to the new situations.

“There are really many persons and institutes and levels you have to cooperate and in a way it is demanding. And as a representative you have to be aware of the backgrounds of those persons who you cooperate with so that you know because for instance, you are working in a group home or somebody is officer in this / Police officer so they have their own structures there, which restrict what they are able to do cause they have certain role and it helps you to understand that you are not getting into fight with them” (I3)

Apart from changing policies and having to adjust on new sets of rules, the informants also reflected on the changes of the political system every four years as having an effect on the way matters concerning the reception of UMAS are organized. Whenever a new political tenure comes into power, a new system is created. Again, keeping up with the changes creates a challenge for the representatives. In addition, it was mentioned that the constant changes created inequality between the UMAs living in different parts of the country.

“That is a difficult area. I think it is mainly to do with politics. And that is something that you cannot easily change. People who do the politics and the politics they change every four years. So that is why you cannot make a system that is prepared for asylum seekers. Then you would have more similar group homes and reception centers. So they would keep the right and equal support for everybody.” (I1)

Another point of view to the relationship with the authorities is the independent position that the representatives have. The informants expressed their uncertainty on the possibility of

losing their independent form of representation. At the time of the interviews there was an ongoing notion that the activities of representatives were going to be taken over and were to be supervised by the Immigration Office. The uncertainty was intensified by the fact that nobody knew what kind of control would be imposed on representatives as a result of this change. Stricter control was seen as a challenge for the work of the representatives.

“Of course we have been a little bit afraid that are they going to guide us to some way? Because we have learned to be independent always, and that is what it is going to be, and it should be, because we are independent person. Not guided by police, not guided by immigration service or anyone” (I2)

## 5.2 Communication

Communication was another theme, which came up within the work of representatives in relation with UMAS. Since the representatives deal with UMAS from different backgrounds, communication was seen important in the daily interaction. Most of the informants brought up the opportunity to use an interpreter within the system. At the same time as this was seen as a necessity and a positive support for the communication with the UMAS, it was also mentioned as an issue causing challenges for the communication. One of the challenges that the representatives sometimes come across was that the interpreter did not possess sufficient skills of the language. This was a challenge considered to hinder smooth communication with UMAS.

“...afterwards the child said no more, not this interpreter any more. Cause even if I didn’t understand the language, but I understood he couldn’t interpret it directly because he had to go around the question from many sides....” (I4)

One informant pointed out that an UMAS and an interpreter may have some tensions arising from their ethnic backgrounds. This tension can be another factor hindering smooth communication between the interpreter and an UMAS. It becomes a challenge, as the representative has to pay more attention to the facial and bodily expressions of UMAS in order to know if the child is comfortable with the interpreter. On the other hand, this might not be possible in the case of interpretation through the telephone, which created another challenge to the representatives.

“Sometimes, for example, (nationality of UMAS), they might be from different clans so they might have some difficulties. I mean the backgrounds as well. Like if they (translator and UMAS) have been fighting against each other. But if

I see that they get along sometimes it might be even useful for them to say something extra" (I1)

Despite of the importance of the interpreter, the informants reported that the presence of an interpreter sometimes interfere the privacy between representatives and UMAS. For some representatives, it was important not to use interpreters in unofficial communication. Others felt that they also needed the interpreter for the more informal communication, but due to the time limit, of which a translator was paid for, made it difficult for a representative to spend extra time with a translator in order to know the UMAS. Moreover, in some cases interpreters lacked competence of handling sensitive issues when translating, as illustrated in the following quotation;

"..I did a real big job with that girl that she started to tell things and when she started to tell her history/happenings so the interpreter started to cry and I was so angry, furious because that means that traumatised children are really sensitive they sense if adult is not able to take everything or can't listen"(I3)

The above quote not only illustrates the interference of privacy, but also shows how some of the interpreters may lack competence to deal with sensitive issues said by either the UMAS or the representatives.

### 5.3 Recruitment of representatives

The recruitment of representatives is an issue, which causes challenges within the category of representatives in relation to the authorities. It can be seen as a challenge from several angles. First of all, the informants pointed out that there was a need for recruiting more representatives in order to meet the rising number of UMAS. However, it was not just the number of representatives that should be looked into, but also the qualification of the representatives. As one informant claimed, there were concerns with the qualifications of some representatives

"Well the good thing is that we have many good legal representatives. But of course not everybody, I have met legal representatives that are not in the right way. But again, it is the question who is the one who is going to recruit them" (I1)

As the informant pointed out, part of the challenge lies with the authority that recruits the representatives. The recruitment can be affected by the kind of relationship the representa-



tive has with the recruiters. One informant implied that sometimes representatives get into antagonistic relations with the recruiters by simply being a demanding representative. According to the informant the recruiters have ceased to appoint some representative due to that reason.

“One thing that I have noticed is the social worker usually takes contact with representative that could be possible for this job. But then the other side of this is that the social worker is often the other part you should work towards and sometime you could get some problems. If you have complained about the social worker before, but why should they then take contact again with you that would you like another child? That is what I see as a problem if you are demanding representative then, the social workers don't like you to have any more children” (I4).

The quote above shows not only how a representative might find him or herself in conflicting relationship with authorities, but also how a representative struggles with a dilemma to balance the two; such as representing UMAS fairly well without upsetting the social worker or any other individual involved with UMAS.

#### 5.4 Support for the representatives

The findings show that support for the representatives is one of the most important aspects for the work of representatives. This theme concerns the relation of the representatives with the authorities. The main challenge lies with the training provided for the representatives. Training for the representatives was an issue that informants found not to be up to date. Since representatives work with clients from different backgrounds, training was seen to be important. However, the informants felt that the current training does not cover the whole range of issues the representatives have to deal with. The trainings mentioned by the informants were the basic trainings organized by the group homes and two seminars organized every year by the Ministry of Interior. The seminars deal with introduction of new laws and changes within the ministry. The current trainings offered were seen as insufficient to help a representative to find the right answers of daily issues of representation they face.

“So the training is one thing, which is really missing and I think good representatives are such kind that they are interested at what they are doing and you have yourself to figure out a lot of things. Usually these training sessions are very similar. They are normally talking about this Aliens Act. That is the main thing what they are talking about or try to teach... That is good but as repre-

representatives with this work you need more. Sometimes you face really difficult questions you don't have any answers and don't even know where you get the answers. And you have just tried to find them by your own. So it's not a hobby" (13)

One informant implied that due to lack of proper training many representatives impose their own style of representation. This may create confusion on the role of the representative.

"...It has been mixed little bit now when we have new guardians and we have lack of education for this job. Everyone makes it little bit own style and some people they have thought they are working little bit like free time leaders for the children trying to amuse them and so on but I think that is not my role at all" (12)

The confusion on the role remains a challenge to the representatives. Trainings were seen as an opportunity to provide a collective standard of representation. All in all, the informants presented a balanced view of trainings provided. They appreciated the fact that the current training, despite the challenges they experienced, had a number of benefits. For example, among the benefits of current trainings, was the fact that it enhanced expansion of own network, such as meeting other representatives from other parts of Finland. The training was also appreciated as it supported representatives with understanding of new changes of laws concerning UMAS.

### 5.5 Processing of psychological stress

As representatives and the UMAS they represent face difficult situations, the processing of personal stress created a challenge to the representatives. This was identified as a challenge within the category of representatives in relation to themselves. When a representative forms a close relationship with the UMAS, they normally want to succeed on behalf of the UMAS. The informants mentioned that they were affected if they could not succeed on behalf of the UMAS they represented. For example, informants reported that waiting time during the asylum process and the return of the child to the Dublin countries where there is no EU standard procedures on UMAS was among the highest cause of stress.

...waiting is also. Because when I meet certain child she will ask me the same things: when is it going to happen, when is it going to happen? And when my decision comes? Even if I try to ask from the Immigration service about that, ok you are still in the line (the officers say)...It has been quite frustrating when

you can see young person with a lot of potential and you can't do anything for him or her. And then I have been quite down. When a child must be returned back" (I2)

As the examples above show, the representatives are sometimes emotionally affected by the situations the children face. Inability to answer difficult questions, feelings of not being able to support, not being able to influence some of the decisions made by the authorities on behalf of the UMAS are creating stressful situations and the representatives have to face the challenge of processing their personal stress.

## 5.6 Negative attitudes

Negative attitudes towards representatives were among the challenges the representative of UMAS face when representing UMAS. The informants reported that there had been discouraging attitudes towards representatives both from the authorities as well as from members of general public.

### 5.6.1 Negative attitudes of authorities towards representatives and UMAS

The authorities are supposed to understand the importance of the role of representatives to the UMAS. However, according to the informants, some members of authorities, such as police officers, Ministry of Interior, and Immigration office, do not value the role of representatives as such. They see the representatives as ordinary people for the UMAS. For example one informant explained,

"I have understood that somehow from the talk show from the Ministry, that it has not been their interest to keep this like a profession. Sometimes they have talked that no you are just guardians, you are basic level persons for the children. You don't have to take care of those things. They have lawyers who are taking care of these things and so on. I do not agree with them. Because we are facing the child quite a lot and we have to explain many things to them. And we share the joy and the sorrow. So that is why we are important" (I2)

This kind of role dilemma created by such attitude from the staff of the ministry can be very discouraging. As the informant pointed out, the UMAS regard representatives as the first link. They rely on representatives for explanation in many dilemmas they face. Therefore, before contacting the lawyer, it is the duty of the representatives to explore the possibilities for the UMAS.

One informant remarked that there is still a challenge whereby the actors working on behalf of the UMAS do so from an adult point of view. The quote below illustrates this well:

“I think that in Finland they speak a lot about what is the best interest of the child. If you see papers and what is written, it looks better. But what is happening in the field in practice is quite much different and that is real frustrating. In our society it’s quite much and I think reception in Finland, the work they do in that field is done in the point of adults. So, I mean that from the adult point of view, you see that when we arrange things we do so and so and this procedure are done in this way and that way and you just fit the child in and if you think really and go deeper on what is the best interest of or what is the child’s benefit so, they walk in a different level” (I3)

Similar to the issue explained in the above quote, informants mentioned that they had even seen cynical behavior of some of the officers during some police and immigration interviews of UMAS. This attitude disturbed the representatives as well. This was because the representatives had to find the means of making the officers concerned understand that they are dealing with a child and that the child deserves respect as well. This is illustrated in the following quotations:

“But I have been in those interviews many times with the police that they just do not care that it is a child concerned and they just do not care what it is to be an asylum seeker” (I1)

“I asked others when I have problems with a person in Immigration Office because of how the person reacted in the interview, the one that asks the questions. I did not like the way he asked and the way that he reacted to the answers. And he started laughing to the boy about some (describing the situation)....” (I4)

#### 5.6.2 Negative attitudes of the general public members towards representatives

The members of the general public formed a category that came up as posing indirect challenge towards the work of representatives. The attitudes of the members of public was also said to be discouraging. In a way some members of the society still maintain negative opinions and racist comments towards people working with the UMAS.

“.... and then Finnish people are racist, which doesn’t help very much either. It’s really making you angry. And even like I’ve told quite many people that I am a legal guardian and I am quite proud of that and open about that, but there are still some people I just wouldn’t tell because they wouldn’t understand” (15)

The quote above illustrates the moral dilemma a representative can find him or herself in. To know how to react to such attitude as well can be very challenging for an individual representative.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to find out the challenges that representatives of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAS) experience in their work. In general, the representatives showed awareness about the on-going situation and the issues that they faced in their field of work. Although a number of challenges were outlined, the participants still had positive issues to say about their work. They considered challenges as part and parcel of their work and they approached those challenges in positive ways. The findings indicated challenges concerning relationship building, communication, recruitment of representatives, support for representatives, processing of psychological stress and negative attitudes.

Relationship building was considered amongst the core skills for a successful helping relation for UMAS. Not only was relationship building considered as important with the UMAS, but also with the other agencies and authorities dealing with UMAS. Relationship building with UMAS has a major contribution for representatives to estimate the best interest of the child (see integration Act 493/1999 section 26 -27 and the Aliens Act 301/2004 chapter 6). In general, the better and more open the relationship is, the more a representative can get information about the UMAS and the more a representative can help him or her. However, the creation of the relationship was partly hindered by the experiences the child had had in the past and the age of the child. The younger the child was or the more traumatic experiences the child had had, the more difficult it was felt to build the relationship through an open discussion. In such instances, the representatives may find themselves in very difficult situation. Since this study did not go deep to find the solutions representatives use to such dilemma, a question remain as to whether the representatives are capacitated enough or left to rely on their own skills in building trustful relationship with UMAS of such stature.

In building and maintaining relationship with the authorities, the informants reported that the wide range of different institutions to deal with, the varied rules and codes of conduct as well as constant changes of the personnel and the policies sometimes caused challenges for the

representatives in finding ways to help the UMAS. As one informant said, it was important to have a good relationship with all authorities as it affected the handling of the issues crucial to the UMAS. Since it seems that a lot is left on the initiatives of the individual representatives, the question can be raised whether the system is equal to all representatives. It should be considered whether this could create a situation where an experienced representative can speed up the procedures through his/her good contacts whereas a new representative might not know how to do that. On the other hand, it can also be questioned whether forming close relations with the authorities might create a situation where conflicts of interest arise. As Bateman (2000: 25) argues, an advocate should not have any affiliation with the organization providing the services in order to avoid conflict of interests.

One aspect of the relationship building with the authorities is the independent form of representation that the representatives have. The informants were worried about losing their independency. This was intensified by the information that by July 2010 the activities of representatives would belong to the Department of Immigration Directorate. The representatives were concerned as to whether this move would have some implication on the freedom of their position in representing the UMAS. In fact, representatives reported that they had been transferred twice in the last ten years from two ministries: from Ministry of Labour to Ministry of Interior. Many informants in this study mentioned that it is better not to identify representatives with authorities as it might create a conflict of interest. This reflects Brooke's (2002:14) notion that in order to be a good advocate, representatives should be given a freedom to act independently on behalf of the people they represent. When considering the fact that many UMAS fled from persecution or arrived from the countries characterised by violence, they usually feel threatened by the authorities. As for representatives belonging to directorate of immigration may increase the fear of UMAS and thus, may harm the building of trustworthy relations between representatives.

Dalrymple and Hough (1995:115) emphasize the independent position of representatives (advocates) for the sake of young people. The benefit of not forming any affiliation with authorities was considered as part and parcel for a representative to be able to express and represent children views without fear of punishment from the authorities. Also it is easier for the children to discuss difficult issues with the person whom they trust. Dalrymple and Hough maintain that the successful helping relation is possible to achieve only if the person involved with the child is fully independent (*ibid*). Bateman (2000:26) indicates that usually the association between the authorities and the representatives end up with the authorities coercing the representative to make their clients cooperative with the authorities. Now, the uncertainty echoed by representatives can be well understood within these profound evidences proposed by these writers. Even if moving the activities of representatives under the wing of

Finnish Immigration authority is for good intentions, the voice of representatives should not be dismissed without understanding their reason for such worries.

Communication was one of the challenges in relation to UMAS within the work of the representatives. A common language between the representative and the UMAS can be seen as crucial for the work of the representative to succeed. Since it was very rare for the representative and the UMAS to share the same mother tongue, there was a procedure in place for the use of interpreters. This was in line with the principle of the best interest of the child, stated in the Act 493/1999 (section 26-27), to allow the child to use his/her own mother tongue in expressing his/her own views. As shown in the findings of this study, there were some challenges related to the use of interpreters. It was pointed out that the general conduct of some of the interpreters affected the smooth communication and the creation of a trustful relationship between the representatives and UMAS. This was because some of the interpreters did not necessarily have the skills to process the sensitive information they hear while interpreting the stories of UMAS. Therefore, representatives had to use extra effort in order to manage the situations. In addition, this implies that sometimes the use of the interpreter intruded the privacy between the UMAS and the representative.

Another issue related to the use of interpreters concerned with the language itself: sometimes the interpreter did not know the language well enough to convey the messages clearly. In some instances it happened that there were some tensions between the interpreter and the UMAS due to their ethnic backgrounds. As a result, in some situations the representatives had to interpret the interpretation through the facial and bodily expressions of the UMAS. As one informant said, the representative should be really sensitive and listen carefully in order to ensure that the child has understood the interpretation. This can be expected in situations where you have to use a third person to interpret the communication and therefore this should not be considered as a surprising result. However, it provides an example of the variety of skills that is needed from the representative. For this reason, recruiting representatives from different multicultural backgrounds would perhaps help out to find better communication skills and make the situations easier. This challenge and suggestions were already echoed in the study conducted by Välisalo (2005:57). There was a need of recruiting representatives from the same ethnic background as UMAS.

The recruitment process of the representatives was a theme of challenge attributed to the category of authorities in relation to the work of representatives. Two notable issues were raised such as reluctance in appointing more representatives with child-care related background and personal conflict between the representatives and the one who recruit them. The informants pointed out that part of this challenge is caused by the authorities involved in appointing representatives. The problem of reluctance in appointing qualified representatives

that have a child-care related background could be traced back at the Act on Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum seeker (Act 493/1999). The section 27 of that Act does not set up any preferable qualification and that anyone who is interested to be representatives of UMAS can simply do so provided, he or she has an understanding of law. This issue raised by the informants should not be taken lightly.

Dalrymple and Hough (1995:117) for example, indicate that there are two main reason of why representatives have to have a recognised qualification of child-care related field. First it is because the role of representative/advocates is difficult and demanding. Thus, representatives have to have knowledge and expertise to match the demanding nature of working with children. Secondly, the children feel valued if they know that a lot of consideration has been put to select a qualified representative. However, the qualification background is not much given consideration in Finland. For example, there is a law that demands a person involved with children to declare his or her criminal record. However, according to some informants, they were not even asked of that record when they were appointed. This indicates how serious the nature of such worries the informants had concerning the qualification of some of the representatives of UMAS in Finland. The fact that this comes from the representatives themselves, the authorities concerned ought to see how to incorporate the views of the representatives when appointing the representatives. This challenge was also mentioned in the study conducted by Välisalo (2005:56).

Also similar to the theme of recruitment of representatives, the findings indicated that a representative who demands a lot on behalf of the child was seen as a problem in the eyes of the recruiters. According to the findings the recruiters ceased to recruit some representative due to that reason. This issue shows a typical dilemma that a representative can face in his or work. This finding can be new for this study however; similar kinds of challenges have been identified for professionals involved with advocacy for children and young people somewhere else. For example Boylan and Dalrymple (2009:22) indicate that complains that the representatives (advocates) make on behalf of the children, usually lead to tense relationship with other professions involved with the child.

Training was another theme attributed to the challenges representatives had as part of the relation with the authorities. The findings of this study highlighted the importance of periodic training in supporting the work of the representatives. However, as also highlighted previously in the study of Välisalo (2005:56), there was lack of training for the representatives. Välisalo (2005) was more concerned with the training of the newly recruited representatives. The same problem was brought out by the informants of this study. However, in this study the challenge on training was more related to time-to-time trainings that reflect the current issues facing the representatives. Since this problem of lack of trainings for the representatives



continue, it clearly seems to be a remarkable challenge as almost five years has passed since the studies of Välisalo (2005) and the problem still prevails. On the other hand, this shows how the response of the service provider on the needs of the representatives as advocates can be slow, as Bateman (2000: 25-26) affirms.

A new aspect on the challenge of trainings brought out by the informants of this study concerns the content of the trainings that were provided by the authorities. It seems that the content of the trainings and seminars provided were more or less repeated year after year. The informants felt that the content of the trainings did not reflect enough the current realities of their work. It can be argued that there is a need for the representatives to be consulted more on the content of the trainings. This is because they face an UMAS on a daily basis and therefore, consultation might help to plan for the trainings that reflect the practical realities of the work of the representatives.

Nevertheless, the informants gladly pointed out the benefits of the trainings that they had already attended. The trainings enabled representatives to meet each other and extend their personal network. Furthermore, the trainings were seen as tools in enhancing similar standards of representation for every representative. However, as the training was not adequately supported, many representatives had their own style of working. This was seen as a challenge because the UMAS might start pointing at the differences among representatives and the ability of representing them. This in turn will harm the relation between the UMAS and the representatives. Such challenge is similar to Citizen Advocacy. Bateman states (2000:25) that citizen advocacy suffers from challenges related to lack of uniform model of representation.

When looking at the challenge expressed by the representatives concerning the support of authorities in providing training for the representatives, few notable gaps can be identified in the current systems of representatives. First, the issue of dependence on authorities for providing support such as training. Since representatives articulated the need for maintaining independent position in representing UMAS they have to establish ways that will do away with dependence on authorities. This does not necessarily mean to completely ignore the support of authorities, but rather to bridge the existing gaps and challenges that they experience at the moment by their own means. As Rantanen (1998:26) claims, there is a need for representatives to have internal network that will help them to come up with collective solutions. This in a way is similar to the approach of self-advocacy as explained in section 3.2 in which Bateman (2000:18) describes as a process on which individuals act collectively to represent themselves for their own benefit. By so doing, representatives will find collective solutions of the challenges they experience.

The second gap that is seen in the system of representatives in Finland is the lack of culture of advocacy among the representatives themselves (Dalrymple and Hough 1995:121). A culture of advocacy requires resources to be allocated into the agency involved with advocacy for children so that they are able to promote the views and rights of children more efficiently. The issue here is who will help representatives to locate enough resources to exercise a culture of advocacy? Or is it not the time for representatives to regroup and look for the means of helping themselves? Already when the data were collected the informants indicated the intention of forming a central network for all representatives. But, as the informants claimed, this intention has been mentioned year and year out and still, nothing concrete or practical is established.

As for the processing of psychological stress, it concerns the challenges representatives face in relation to the aspects of their work. The findings showed that the processing of psychological stress is a challenging part of the work. Many informants mentioned that there were stages in their work, where they felt powerless, for example with influencing some aspects of decisions made by authorities on behalf of UMAS. Representatives clearly pointed out that there was a feeling of frustration either with decisions made by Finnish Immigration Office or with a long waiting time process. The challenge with the processing of the psychological stress is perhaps linked with the lack of training. Supporting the capacity building on facing the challenging situations would perhaps decrease the stress experienced by the representatives. Moreover, challenges of this nature are not new in the representation work. For example, Dalrymple and Hough (1995:120) explain that normally advocates want to succeed on behalf of the children they represent. Failure in challenging injustice on behalf of the child leads to many advocates feeling frustrated and emotionally disturbed.

Negative attitudes were a theme of challenge that representatives reported to experience when it came to dealing with authorities and general members of public. The devaluing of the representatives' role has been mentioned as one among the challenges the representatives face when dealing with the authorities. The representatives are not seen as professional and important people to UMAS as they come second to lawyers who do not even spend that much time with UMAS.

This study brought out several issues, but it was not possible to discuss all of them within the scope of this study. As this study only had a small group of informants working only in a small area of Finland, it is not possible to draw large-scale conclusions of the challenges in the work of representatives on the basis of this study. Thus, further research with a larger sample of representatives from different parts of the country would be needed. Furthermore, one of the challenges that the representatives mentioned was the different processes and practices of authorities affecting the work of representation in different parts of Finland. Looking into

comparative information on the working environments of representatives in different parts of the country would be beneficial for establishing common standards of representation.

On the other hand, the most important relation for the representatives is the relation with UMAS. In order to further develop and support the work of representatives, it might also be beneficial to find out the perspectives of UMAS to the work of representatives. Allowing the UMAS to bring out their views would also be in line with the article 12 of the UNCRC: a child should be listened to and given opportunity to articulate his or her own views in matters concerning him/her.

## 7 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In qualitative research, it is important to evaluate the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study. According to Gray (2004:345), trustworthiness in qualitative study can be looked into through credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Ethical considerations, on the other hand, deal with minimizing the harm to the participants of the research as well as the society in general. This chapter examines the ways in which the study adhered to the issues of trustworthiness and ethical consideration throughout the process of data gathering to the writing of the final report.

### 7.1 Trustworthiness

As mentioned earlier, the trustworthiness of this study is analysed through the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability as introduced by Gray (2004:345). The concept of credibility refers to how well the researcher's interpretation of the data responds to the reality of the informant's perception of the phenomenon. In order to establish the grounds for credibility, the conductors of this study had constant dialogue with each other and consulted the tutors on how to report the views of the informants in case of dilemmas. In addition, credibility can be reinforced by receiving and using feedback. As Shenton declares,

"questions and observations may well enable the researcher to refine his or her methods, develop a greater explanation of the research design and strengthen his or her arguments in the light of the comments made" (Shenton 2004:67)

In this study, the view proposed by Shenton has been taken into consideration by using the comments from the tutors as well as from the opponents during the evaluation seminar of the study.

However, the informants play a key role in determining the credibility of a study. The researcher has the responsibility to check with the informants whether the analysis corresponds to the views of the informants. As for this study, the informants were given an option to comment on the findings before inclusion to the final report. However, they chose to rely to the conductors of the study with their analysis. Therefore, some of the original quotes from the informants have been provided to support and illustrate the interpreted phenomenon in a way the informants said.

Moreover, in terms of credibility the chosen methods of data gathering and analysis play a role in arriving to accurate interpretations of the phenomenon. In this study, semi-structured interview was chosen for data gathering. This enabled the informants to talk openly about their perceptions. As for the analysis of the data, there were no preconceptions but the data was approached inductively through the method of thematic analysis. In addition, having two conductors for the study increased the objectivity of the analysis as personal interpretations were reduced through discussions and debates.

However, one challenge in relation to credibility concerns the language. It can be questioned whether the data might have been more descriptive if the informants could have expressed themselves in their native language Finnish. The informants were given opportunity to express themselves in their native language in case they could not find the right expressions in English. The interviews were recorded in order to secure the correct translation of Finnish expressions.

In terms of transferability, O`Leary states (2004:62-63) that transferability concerns with the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts. Due to the small sample of informants, the findings of this study cannot be widely generalized. Moreover, as most of the informants came from Southern Finland, their information cannot provide a bigger picture of the issues the representatives of UMAS in other parts of Finland face. As the findings also show, the working conditions of representatives vary in different areas and transferability is not possible to all areas. As O`Leary (2004, 62) claims, generalization can be better adopted in studies with quantitative methods or a study with a broader representation and larger sample sizes.

Nevertheless, David and Sutton (2004:153) argue that a smaller sample size with a deliberate and careful plan can yield more information than a large sample without a careful plan. As such, this study can provide an insight to the challenges experienced by representatives and a starting point for a wider research. As Denscombe (2003: 11) claims, social researchers often cannot get the information from every member of the target group being researched and

therefore they depend on collecting evidence from a smaller group. In some cases the results can be applied to the wider target group.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, it is also important to provide a reader with sufficient descriptions of the phenomenon for the reader to reach an understanding of it. As dependability is concerned, O`Leary (2004:62-63) explains that it

“indicates quality assurance through methodological protocols that are designed and developed in a manner that is consistent, logical, systematic, well-documented, and designed to account for research subjectivities”;

As such, this study aimed to find out the experiences of the representatives concerning the challenges in their work. The chosen methods reflected that phenomena. The semi-structured interviews allowed the informants to reflect their experiences openly (see May, 2001:123). In addition, the methods used in this study were explained transparently and the raw data were stored in a safe place in case for a need for further review.

Confirmability deals with the objectivity of the writer and the way in which he or she might shape the results of the study on the basis of his or her experiences and motivation (Gray 2004:345). Having worked with UMAS, the conductors of the study had an interest to the topic of this study. However, the neutrality was maintained through having constant discussions between the conductors. In addition, the critical observations of the opponents were considered from this perspective as well. This notion is supported by O`Leary (2004:57) who claims that “the objectivity of research cannot be carried out without tremendous debate.”

## 7.2 Ethical considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, Punch (2004, 281) argues that qualitative approaches break to some extent into people`s private lives. Therefore, ethical issues in the process of collection of information should be considered. As Eisner and Peshkin (1990: 224) state, any researcher has a commitment to moral issues and actions. More than this, there should be researcher`s sensitivity to recognize ethical issues and then responsibility to act according to the values and ethics (ibid). Denscombe (2003, 136) outlines three ethical principles, which were also used by this study. The first principle concerns the protection of the interest of the participant, the second principle is about avoiding deception or misrepresentation of the findings and the third principle deals with the informed consent of the participants.

In order to ensure that the participants receive no harm, the study applied the principle of anonymity. According to Kvale (1996:114) “the protection of subject`s privacy by changing

their names and identifying features is an important issue in the reporting of interviews". In this study, the informants' names were not used but the interviews were coded with numbers corresponding to the number of informants (I1 – I6). However, the informants were not named according to the order they were interviewed. In addition, the names denoting nationality, the countries of the UMAS as well as other detailed information were omitted throughout the reporting.

In terms of ensuring that there was no deception or misinterpretation, the data were recorded and transcribed. The first three interviews were transcribed with all expressions, including the gap fillers, laughter and interruptions. However, this was found time consuming and it made the transcripts fragmented and hard to understand. Therefore, in the other three interviews the gap fillers, laughter and interruptions were not included. This did not affect the actual content of the expressions. The discussions among the conductors supported in finding the most relevant quotes for the analysis.

The third principle of ethics according to Denscombe (2003:138) is informed consent. It deals with not forcing or inciting the informants to participate in the study. In obtaining the informants, this study used a snowballing sampling technique, which uses recommendations of participants for other possible informants. The recommended individuals were sent a letter of invitation requesting their participation in the study (see Appendix 1) together with a letter of informed consent. The letter included information on the purpose of the study and the issues of confidentiality. In addition, it explained the measures of ensuring anonymity. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study any time under any consequence as signing the letter of informed consent does not make any obligations but proves that the conductors of the study acted correctly during the recruitment for this study.

All in all, this study was also a learning experience for both conductors of this study. It helped in realising the personal and professional strengths and limitations. The study has provided us with an opportunity to learn more through the reflection of the framework of the work of representatives. In that way we tried to have an input to the work of the representatives, following the anti-oppressive ethics. The principle of anti-oppressive ethics that we adhered to was self-awareness of our cultural and social barriers and the ability to apply them to the advantage of this study. The most important element of self-awareness was continuous dialogues. Clifford and Burke (2009:188) claims that a researcher need to understand own cultural and social values of which might impact the study as well. Being in the position of a researcher always associated with power over the one who are being researched. However, as our prime motivation was to understand the challenges representatives faced in their work, the power relation was balanced as the informants had the power as well to share or not share the information for the use of this study. Therefore, throughout the process of report-

ing, we had an obligation of ensuring the interests of the representatives were fully represented.

## REFERENCES

- Barnes, D. & Brandon 2000. Independent Specialist Mental Health Advocacy Services in England and Wales. Durham. University of Durham
- Bateman, N.2000. Advocacy Skills for Health and Social Care and Professionals. London: Jessica Kingsley
- Boylan, J and Dalrymple, J. 2009. Understanding Advocacy for Children and younger's. Open University Press McGraw-Hill Education
- Brandon M, Schofield G, & Trinder L. 1998. Social work With Children. Palgrave Hound mills
- Brooke, J. 2002. Good Practice in Citizen Advocacy. Kidderminster BILD publication
- Bryman, A. 2008. Social research methods. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Oxford Univeristy Press
- David, M.&Sutton, C .2004. Social Research. The basics. SAGE Publication Ltd
- Dalrymple, J and Hough, J. 1995. editors, Having A Voice, An Exploration Of Children's Right and Advocacy. Venture Press 16 Kent Street Birmingham
- Denscombe, M. 2003. The Good research guide for small-scale social researcher projects. Open University Press
- Denzin, K. & Lincoln,S. 2000. Handbook of qualitative research. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London. Sage Publications
- Dunning, A. 1995 Citizen Advocacy with Older People: A Code of Good Practice, London, Centre For Policy on Ageing.
- Eisner, E. & Peshkin. 1990. Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate. Teachers New York. College Press
- Finnish Immigration Service, ERF, Refugee Advice Centre. 2010. Representation In The Asylum Process. Guide for representatives of Minor asylum seekers. Helsinki AT-Julkaisutoimisto Oy,
- Finnish Act on Integration of Immigrant and Reception of Asylum Seekers: Unofficial translation Ministry of Labour (Act 493/1999) (downloaded on 13.09.2009). [www.finlex.fi](http://www.finlex.fi)
- Finnish Aliens Act (301/2004) Unofficial translation. Ministry of Labour (downloaded on 30.8.2010). [www.finlex.fi](http://www.finlex.fi)
- Finnish Immigration Office: Statistics of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in 2006 [www.migri.fi](http://www.migri.fi) (downloaded 13.09.2009)
- Finnish Immigration Office: Statistics of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in 2007 (downloaded on 13.09.2009) [www.migri.fi](http://www.migri.fi)
- Finnish Immigration Office: Statistics of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in 2008 (downloaded on 13.09.2009) [www.migri.fi](http://www.migri.fi)
- Finnish Immigration Office: Statistics of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Jan-Jul 2009 (downloaded on 13.09.2009) [www.migri.fi](http://www.migri.fi)



- Gilbert, N. 2001. *Researching social life*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London. Sage Publications
- Gray, M. & Webb, S. A: (2009) *Social Work Theories and Methods*. Sage Publication Inc London
- Gray, D. 2004. *Doing research in the real world*. London. Sage Publications.
- ICRC - International Committee of Red Cross 2004 *Inter - Agency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children*. Central Tracing Agency & Protection Division, Geneva Switzerland
- International Organization For Migration. 2002. *Children First - Minors in The Asylum Process: A training Programme For Officials*. Helsinki
- Jandt, F. 2004. *An Introduction To Intercultural Communication: Identities in a Global Community*: 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. SAGE Publications Inc
- Jorgensen, D, L. 1989. *Participant Observation. A Methodology for Human Studies*. CA: Sage Publications.
- Kvale S. 1996. *InterViews*. London. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Kursula J. 2009 *The process of asylum seeking and the involvement of legal representative*. (downloaded on 07.09.2009) <http://www.lskl.fi>
- Mason, J. 2002. *Qualitative researching*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. SAGE Publications London
- May, T. 2001. *Social Research: Issues, methods and process*. Third Edition Open University
- Miles, M. Huberman M. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. (London Beverley Hills)
- Mikkonen, A & Niitamo, A. 2000 *Unaccompanied Minor Migrants in the European Union The Example of Helsinki, Second Report on the Project MinorMig Unaccompanied Minors as Vulnerable Groups*. Edition Parabolis Publishing Department of Berliner Institut fur
- Newbigging, K Thomas N, et al 2010. *Good Practice in Social Care for Asylum Seekers and Refugees*. Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), Golding House, London
- Niemi, H. 2009. *Unaccompanied Minors Seeking Asylum in Finland*. Revised article version may 25<sup>th</sup> 2010. SW & S News Magazine (downloaded on 30.07.2010) <http://www.socmag.net>
- O`Leary, Z. 2004. *The essential guide to doing research*. SAGE Publications Ltd
- Payne. M. 2009 *Social Care Practice in Context (Reshaping Social Work)* Palgrave MacMillan
- Punch, K. 1998. *Introduction to Social Research. Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches*. Sage Publications. London
- Rantanen, M. 1998. *Children At Risk - A Project For Developing Methods in Recruiting and Training Legal Representatives For Unaccompanied Minors*. Ministry of Labour, Finland; Migration Division, Helsinki
- Sang, B. and O'Brien, J. 1984. *Advocacy: The UK and American Experiences*, London, King Edward's Hospital Fund

Shenton, A. 2004. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. Nortrumbia University. Newcastle upon Tyne. IOS Press

Silverman, D. 2000. Doing qualitative research, a practical handbook. SAGE Publications London

United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child (UNCRC).1989  
<http://www2.ohchr.org.fi> (downloaded on 30.08.2010)

United Nations High Commission for Refugees 1994 Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care.

United Nations High Commission for: Definitions and Obligation - definition of an asylum seeker: <http://www.unhcr.org>. (Accessed on 30.8.2010)

Wertheimer, A. 1998 Citizen Advocacy: A powerful partnership. Citizen Advocacy information and Training. London

#### UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

Välisalo, M. 2005. The Value of Comparing Social Work Policies Related To Family Reunification, Guardianship and Aftercare of Unaccompanied Children in Finland and Greece. Master's Dissertation: University of East London

## Appendix 1

### Invitation Letter for an Interview

Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Geoffrey Mwano

Hana Muller

Gsm: xx-xxxxxxx: Geoffrey.xxxxxx@xxxxx.xx

Gsm: xx-xxxxxxx: Hana.xxxxxxx

Dear Legal representatives,

#### RE: Request for your participation in the thesis interview

Currently we are enrolled in Laurea Otaniemi finalising our Degree Programme in Social Services. As you have seen from above, our names are, Geoffrey Mwano and Hana Muller. Our degree programme demands writing thesis report based on the multicultural social work since we have majored in that field. We are interested in finding out the challenges in your work of representing minor asylum seekers.

The Purpose of the thesis is to identify challenges, which get on the way of your work and to some extent obstruct your full capacity of representing these minors.

We humbly request, if you would be willing, to be involved in our thesis by allowing us to interview you so that to enable us to understand circumstances that you have to endure in doing your work. Be assured that all information presented during the interviews, will be treated with utmost confidentiality. The identity of the informants will not be revealed, and you have the option if you wish to read the interview findings of the research and analysis process prior to the inclusion in the final report. Interviews will be held in November.

We hope that you will give us permission to interview you, in order to understand your interesting work more clearly.

Kind Regards

Geoffrey & Hana

## Appendix 2

### INFORMED CONSENT, ENGLISH

I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to take part in the interview for thesis on challenges in the work of legal representatives of minor asylum seekers.

I grant authorization for the use of the information I give throughout this interview. Thereby, I understand fully that anonymity and confidentiality will be preserved during the research. I understand that my names will never be disclosed or referenced in any way. I am aware and grant permission to use the information that will be available for the research. I understand that the tapes, transcripts and saved versions, will be handled confidentially and will be erased after the research.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw the permission to participate in this study without explanation at anytime.

Informant's Signatures

Date

### Appendix 3

The aim of this study is to look for the challenges in the work of representatives of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. A single research question is used: what kind of challenges do representative encounter in their work? In formulating the questionnaires, we had divided them into topics. The questionnaires act as a principle of guiding our informants however, depending on the situation some of the questions may be dropped or added during the actual interview.

#### TOPICS FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

##### A. Experiences of the work

1. Would you please tell us something about your work?
2. How long have you been involved in the work of representation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers?

##### B. Handling Diversities

3. How many unaccompanied minor asylum seekers do you represent?
4. Would you please describe to what extent the diverse backgrounds of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers affects your role as a representative?
5. Could you tell us how a representative communicates with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers?
6. Would you describe, what kind of trainings offered to prepare you in dealing with diverse backgrounds of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers?

##### C. Networking among representatives

7. Could you describe how do representatives support each other?
8. How do you take care of your professional health?

##### D. Cooperation with the authorities

9. How would you describe your working relation with police or immigration officers?
10. Would you tell us about cooperation with a group homes?
11. Are there certain stages in your work when you feel powerless? How would you describe those?

##### E. General

12. Is there something else you would like to mention?

## Abbreviations

UMAS	Unaccompanied minor asylum seeker
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
TE-keskus	Employment and Economic Development Centres (Työ- ja elinkeinokeskus)
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children